USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Mendocino National Forest Grindstone Ranger District | 825 N. Humboldt Ave. WillowsCA95988 530-934-3316711-Relay Service

File Code: 2400; 1950
Date: January 23, 2020

Dear Interested Parties and Stakeholders:

The Grindstone Ranger District of the Mendocino National Forest is initiating National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for the Green Flat Restoration Project that lies within a portion of the footprint of the 2018 Ranch Fire. The proposed action includes treatments that will improve forest health conditions within the project area primarily including salvage of merchantable timber, fuel reduction, biomass utilization, and reforestation.

All interested persons, organizations, and agencies; state and local governments; and tribal governments are encouraged to participate at this time and through the public scoping period, which will close on **Wednesday February 21, 2020**.

The Green Flat Restoration Project is located entirely within the Grindstone Ranger District and is approximately 10 miles southwest of Stonyford, California and northeast of Pacific Ridge (see map). The project is primarily along Forest Road M5 with elevations ranging from 2,800 to 5,600 feet. More detailed information regarding the proposed action for the project is outlined below.

The project area is approximately 1,534 acres. This area includes 387 acres along M5 that were previously analyzed under the M3, Felkner, and M5 Roadside Hazard Tree Maintenance Project and an additional 1,147 acres of adjacent lands. Within treatment areas, the Ranch Fire burned conifer forest in a mosaic pattern with different levels of severity as measured by change in tree basal area relative to pre-fire condition (Table 1).

Table 1. Fire severity within proposed treatment areas.

Fire Severity	Percent of Basal Area Loss	Approximate Percent of Treatment Area
High	50-100	79
Moderate	10-49	17
Low	0-9	4

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is re-establish forested conditions and to improve forest health. Managing natural regeneration and replanting trees would accelerate this process and expedite recovery of forest ecosystem functions.

The proposed treatment areas fit one of two restoration strategies: 1) Reforestation of areas that experienced high tree mortality and require planting, and 2) Forest health treatments in areas of low to moderate fire severity that would benefit from removal of excess dead and dying trees but do not require planting. The proposed treatment areas are based on analysis of aerial and satellite imagery, on-the-ground reconnaissance, and collaboration among resource specialists.

Proposed Action

Proposed actions as described below are designed based on post-fire forest conditions with the intent of restoring forested conditions and improving forest health in a timely manner.

1) Reforestation

Reforestation activities, the main focus of this project, would occur on approximately 1,316 acres, dominated by large high fire severity patches. Due to the large size of these patches and the intensity of the fire, few live trees are available to naturally reseed the area. Dead and dying trees would be removed in preparation for planting. Removal of trees could be accomplished by several means such as cutting and removal of biomass and fuels, and/or salvaging merchantable timber as discussed below.

Fuels and biomass. To prepare for planting, dead and dying trees would need to be removed. Removal of these trees would improve the success of the planted trees, would reduce future fuel accumulation, and would provide for worker safety. Cutting of trees and snags would occur across all diameter classes and all species. Trees with a live crown ratio greater than 25% would be retained. Mechanized equipment would be used in areas where slopes do not exceed 35%. Cut trees would be removed as biomass, piled for burning, or lopped and scattered. Snag and down woody debris requirements, as well as protection of broadleaf trees, would be the same as described below for salvage areas.

Salvage of merchantable timber. This project proposes salvage tree harvest of commercial timber on up to 250 acres in the vicinity of Green Flat Campground. Opportunities for commercial timber salvage are limited within the majority of the project area due to rapid deterioration of standing dead trees and difficult access. Designated salvage units would be located on slopes up to 35%, thus allowing mechanized operations. Units would be located away from riparian reserves, identified inner gorges, and unstable areas. Harvested timber would be skidded to designated landings and access roads. Harvesting of trees would follow the Leave-Tree Marking Guidelines for Fire-Injured Trees, which is based on guidelines developed by this region's Forest Health Protection unit.

Retained (marked) trees and snags are meant to serve as seed sources for natural regeneration, shade, and wildlife habitat. If the number of large diameter snags (> 40" diameter at breast height) greatly exceeds forest plan requirements for wildlife management, and potentially increases future fuel loads, excess snags could be removed. Trees that are subject to removal include merchantable ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white fir, incense cedar, and Douglas-fir. Broadleaf trees such as black oak, white oak, as well as species associated with riparian areas including California bay laurel, bigleaf maple, willow, and white alder would not be removed unless they pose a safety or fuels hazard.

Large coarse woody debris (downed logs) would be retained or created to meet wildlife habitat requirements. Created woody debris and litter may be distributed throughout the treatment area to promote hydrologic stability and to create microsites for planting and natural regeneration.

Planting. Planting areas would be concentrated in areas cleared of standing dead trees. Throughout the project area, selected seedling stock would be planted manually. Tree density and species composition would be determined based on land designation and area topography. Seedlings of species most suitable for the area would be planted. Naturally sprouting California black oak and Oregon white oak would be protected during planting as would riparian tree and shrub species such as California bay laurel, bigleaf maple, willow, white alder, and elderberry.

Release. The first manual release of seedlings from competing vegetation is expected to occur within three years following planting. Release would include hand cutting (i.e., grubbing) competing vegetation up to a five-foot radius from the seedling.

Interplanting, second release, pre-commercial thinning. Where planting and/or natural regeneration do not meet the required stocking standards due to poor survival and lack of natural regeneration, additional planting may occur. A second release could occur if competing vegetation threatens the survival of planted stock. In case of great seedling survival and influx of natural regeneration, young trees may be thinned to densities best suited to meet project objectives and Forest management plan.

2) Forest Health Treatments

Forest Health Improvement treatments on approximately 14% of the project area or 218 acres would target areas with low and moderate fire severity. These areas are usually adjacent to or intersect high fire severity patches. Dead and dying trees would be removed to release resources for the remaining live trees. This treatment is designed to resemble forest thinning. Additionally, this treatment would reduce the accumulation of fuels in the future and enhance natural regeneration. Harvest of trees would be based on damage class and/or leave-tree marking guidelines established for this project.

The Forest Service would like to receive any information regarding resource conditions in the project area as well as your input on issues and concerns related to this proposal. Comments may be submitted by the following methods:

Please submit your written comments to:

Mendocino National Forest
825 N. Humboldt Ave.
Willows, CA 95988

By e-mail to: comments-pacificsouthwest-mendocino-grindstone@usda.gov (with a subject line of Green Flat Restoration).

Comments should be submitted by Wednesday, February 21, 2020 to be considered during scoping. Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of

respondents, will be considered part of the public records on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

If you have questions about this proposal, please contact Radek Glebocki, Silviculturist, at radoslaw.glebocki@usda.gov or 530-934-1215.

Sincerely,

CHRISTINE A. HILL
District Ranger

Encl: Project map